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The Kinship System and Social Structure of the Caraja Indians
/Le Système de Parenté et la Structure Sociale des Indiens Carajá/

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/Title page/

121 /43/ Three years ago G. P. Murdock published his "World Ethnographic Sample." It goes without saying that an endeavor of this scope can only be incomplete. Now, as far as the Carajá, one of the nine tribes classified under the heading "Eastern Brazil," are concerned, the set of 30 characteristic features of this society in Murdock's attempt displays significant gaps and serious inaccuracies. It is my intention, here and now, to remedy this state of affairs as well as possible, in order to contribute from my side, while concerning myself with only one case among 565, to a fairer calculation of the human probabilities.

114 [122] [101] [127] To accomplish this task I shall use as a base the data that I was able to collect personally, in the company of my wife and aided by the National Swiss Foundation for Scientific Research, during the rainy season of 1954 to 1955 among the Carajá of the south, as well as, naturally, on the information from our predecessors in the field, Ehrenreich, Krause, Baldus, and Lipkind above all. I am using this opportunity to express the great regret that I feel every time I think of the fact that the rich materials collected by Lipkind have never been published in a satisfactory fashion. The Carajá, although they have been known for a long time, are basically misunderstood. To be fair, it must be added that they themselves do not make the task of investigators easy, and it goes without saying that under these circumstances my own contribution must remain fairly fragmentary in view of the too short period of our stay among them.

121 On the other hand I am convinced that the presentation of facts alone — allegedly pure facts — does not help us to become better acquainted with the human condition, and the second aim of my article is to present to you a first attempt at interpretation of the data concerning the Carajá kinship system, which, not without reason, was left blank in Murdock's attempt.

128 To facilitate the comparison I shall follow the framework of the columns of the "World Ethnographic Sample." The 433 Carajá cultivate primarily tropical tubercles, although maize 11 462 is not lacking; true domesticated animals are absent. [231]

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241 433 462 is not lacking; true domesticated animals are absent. Planting is important as a source of subsistence, but fishing and turtle hunting stand higher in masculine preference as well as being a basis of life. Not only are the men charged with fishing and hunting — less important owing to the scarcity of game — but activity in the gardens is also primarily the business of the men, since the women are satisfied to help as they please, which is undeniably rare among the Amazonian Indians.

433 462 Up to here we are in perfect agreement with the categories chosen by Murdock (Ro, Im, Oo, Dm; columns 1-4). However, in column 5 we find the /44/ first gap. The division of labor assigns gathering to the female sex, except for the harvesting of wild honey, which is considered more as hunting and belongs among the men's tasks. So the Carajá could, after all, be put in the category of "standard division of labor by sex" (thus Ia; column 5).

114 Real difficulties arise when we take into consideration what is properly called social organization. Categorial decisions 36 are not so easy to make there. It is true that our Indians live [221] in compact villages, especially during the rainy seasons. During the rest of the year the Carajá proper like to disperse on the beaches, forming smaller local units, which, nevertheless, are always lined up along the river, the houses of the men (if there are any in the encampments) remaining at the rear, as if the periphery of a circle had been opened and rolled back in a straight line, leaving the center — the houses of the men — at 36 the side of the line. Since the large villages of the rainy season, 62 which are all like this and bear a name, are in reality agamous [114] and without clans, but display a certain tendency toward endogamy, the category assigned by Murdock — compact village observing agamy — (Va; column 6), if it is not definitely wrong, is nevertheless to be taken cum grano salis (tendency toward Sd).

59 As for the family structure, it is normally of the extended type, at least during the rainy season, but the extension is not

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59 so great, and there are, besides the linear families or nonnamed minimal lineages, some independent families (i.e., rather Ll, often Ss and In, instead of Ee; column 7), which agrees with the fact that, besides the customary matrilocal marriage, "neolocal" residence is found (Mn, instead of Mm; column 8) in the dry season on the one hand, and, on the other hand, as a possible
595 nucleus of a new extended family. Polygyny is neither frequent
583 nor favored, whereas it is true that material considerations are absent on the occasion of marriage (thus Mo or To rather than Lo; column 9).

611 We shall now take up the most confused aspect of Carajá
[121] ethnography. The Handbook of South American Indians speaks
615 correctly of double descent. I have shown elsewhere that be-
[114] cause of some inattention in the editing of the famous manual, an incorrect idea of the real nature of this coexistence of patrilineal and matrilineal groupings has arisen. It is a matter, not of moieties, but of three large, named, patrilineal groups, which are primarily the men's affair, in their ceremonial and political life, but nevertheless are concerned with women in the sense of an endogamous tendency. Thus it is not a matter of true parallel descent, and, on the other hand, it is by no
[621] means a question of exogamy, and still less of moieties. At the most one may speak of nonexogamy or agamy as in the case of the villages, which are themselves matrilineal groupings on account of the matrilocal rule of the domestic group just men-
613 tioned. In a strict sense only the small extended family,
596 which can be described as a non-named, minimal, matrilineal
582 lineage, seems to be exogamous. Marriage is permitted with any cousin, parallel or cross, and the matrilateral preference reported by Lipkind (incidentally without any indication of whether it is a matter of parallel or cross cousins!) seems to be only the normative expression of matrilocal marriage, whereas the slight patrilateral preference ascertained by myself is equally in agreement with the rule of endogamy of the patrilineal groups.
[601] In reality, since the relatives are usually "brother" and "sister" with regard to each other, being male and female cousin, as we

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587 shall presently see, the difference does not have much explicative value. In the light of what has been said, it is therefore
[616] necessary to correct the categories set up by Murdock, taking
[615] into account the fact that his category "agamous (nonexogamous)
[114] moieties" should be completed by "agamous phratries" (thus: Pa or Na, La, Da; columns 10-12).

601 The kinship system of the Carajá must now be set forth for the first time, albeit briefly. Murdock left the pertinent
[114] column completely blank. /45/ With regard to male and female cousins, the terminology is of the "Hawaii" type, that is to say, my own generation contains only brothers and sisters.
128 Before continuing, permit me to remind you that we have been able to speak of principles which govern kinship systems. In order not to fall into the trap of "verbalism" decried by Murdock, I hasten to add that it is not a question of causes, but rather of logical principles likely to operate in view of a given situation, whether these be circumstances pertaining to the environment, demography, or the fundamental type of social communication which is involved in each case. Now we could pair up these principles by forming contrasts in the manner of the linguists, contrasts whose terms exclude each other when it is a question of particular relations, but which can alternatively be combined into a whole system of kinship relations. Perhaps it would be preferable to formulate only opposite contrasts, but for the moment I will be satisfied, except in the first case, with contrasts which are clearly contradictory, and thus easier to handle, for that will suffice to attain our immediate goal of elucidating
601 the kinship system of the Carajá. There is contradiction between the classified unity of the generation and the unity of the line of filiation, there is contradiction between differentiation and nondifferentiation of the sexes, as well as of respective ages, between reciprocity and nonreciprocity of terms, finally between classificatory unity and nonunity of brothers and sisters — classificatory unity which, by the way, is not to be confused with the unity of the group of brothers and sisters classified together, nor with a denominative unity.

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601 With regard to the terminology of cousins, we are concerned here with the principle of the unity of the generation and that of the differentiation of the sexes, which remains true for the generation of the grandparents. Between brothers and sisters, to be more precise (and this is naturally valid for male and female cousins), there is only a partial differentiation of the sexes and of the respective ages, just as there is only a partial classificatory unity of the brothers and sisters (and, consequently, of male and female cousins). The terms used for the "parallel" uncles and aunts, on the other hand, are of mixed type according to the relative ages (relative to the parents), the designations for the eldest ones being derived from the terms "father" and "mother," those for the younger ones being from the same root as the words used for designating the grandparents, which, for that matter, is the case for the "cross" uncle and aunt, who, for their part, are not differentiated according to their respective ages. It is evident that there is a tendency to [587] reunite the generation of the parents and to bring it closer to the generation of the grandparents, with an exception being made for the parents themselves, as well as for the oldest brother of the father and for the oldest sister of the mother, for whom the terms are derived from those for the parents — here the levirate and the sororate certainly play their part, and the nuclear family is taken separately. In Murdock's classification it is thus a matter, so far as the uncles (and the aunts) are concerned, of a linear terminology and "bifurcate merging," respectively, and in both cases, derived (Hn and 1; column 13). It must be added that the classificatory unity of brothers and sisters comes into play.

The most striking example of this classificatory unity is shown in an exceptional type of designation for nephews and nieces. A brother and a sister use, it is true, without distinguishing the sex, two different words which we shall translate "nephew-niece," but what is more essential is that both of them conjointly call the children of their brother "son" and "daughter,"

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601 the children of their sister "nephew-niece" (without distinction as to sex). This only makes sense if one wishes to emphasize, along with the unity of the brothers and sisters, the unity of a patrilineal minimal lineage, the children of a sister then belonging [613] to another small exogamic patrilineal group. Now, at present, there is no patrilineal lineage. This would allow us to [611] suppose an historic change from a patrilineal preponderance to a matrilineal preponderance, a change which would be expressed today in double descent. The kinship system which most emphasizes the unity of patrilineal lineage /46/ (of the mother) is the "Omaha" system, which, moreover, one could imagine as structured according to the principle of the classificatory unity of brothers and sisters, which is never the case so far as I know, but which would push the logic of this system to the extreme (the same statement would be valid for the "Crow" system, which marks the unity of the matrilineal lineage, this time of the father).

551 601 Now, brothers-in-law and sisters-in-law (as well as parents-in-law) are classified by "teknonymy," and since in the designation the reference "...of my child" seems to be customarily omitted, this is the same, for the husbands, as the way in which, in the "Omaha" system, the men designate their matrilateral male and female cross-cousins, and for the wives, as the manner of designation used by the women in the "Crow" system, when it is a matter of their patrilateral male and female cousins. I wonder whether there is not a connection between teknonymy in the broad sense and the types produced by linear or consecutive classification.

Teknonymy in the restricted sense, i.e., the terms "lord of so-and-so" and "source of so-and-so" used by a third person, is voluntarily chosen by the parents themselves. "Source of the grandchild" is the daughter-in-law, whereas the son-in-law is called "black-nephew" (the speech of the man being borrowed, this time, by his wife!). This would again be in accord with a historic state of patrilineal preponderance, if one does not

/46 cont./

551 wish to infer at the outset a marriage, formerly prescribed,
601 with the matrilateral female cross-cousin. One must remember,
[183] however, that the present state characterized by a great degree of freedom, in other words, by a degree of "information" or of greater entropy, is also found in the performance of ceremonies, such as in the narration of myths and legends, these expressions of the spiritual life of the Carajá which allow great freedom of variation around a principal theme stubbornly preserved. — Finally teknonymy guides the reciprocal terms of grandparents and grandchildren, so that the grandparents, designated according to their sex, reply by the same word, even if the grandchild is of the opposite sex.

561 Before finishing my article, I must quickly touch on the
554 last two columns of Murdock's attempt. The Carajá distinguish,
615 by speech and by ornaments, age grades. At the same time, an idea of stratification is outlined in the fact that political and religious roles are the heritage of only one of the three patrilineal groups with an endogamous tendency. It is tempting to think
[567] of the classes or castes of the Guaycurú /Guaicuru/, for example, and since there are reports which speak of temporary slaves, Murdock's information in this direction must be corrected (A1, with a tendency towards C1, instead of O; column 14). The
628 villages are politically autonomous, but the Carajá themselves
621 unite some villages in amphictyonies for the performance of
622 certain ceremonies. The hereditary succession of the chiefs
621 goes in the patrilineal line, a grandson being chosen as the candidate, or, if one is lacking, a granddaughter. Consequent-
[178] ly, there is a temporary matrilineal succession in the heart of the patrilineal group, for which there is reserved the role of the chief, who, incidentally, is on the way to complete disappearance (thus: Pp and m, for the Carajá themselves, Ap and m for the Javahé and Chambioá /Shambioa/; column 15).

121 You would not wish me to end on this melancholy note.
[178] I repeat: a people small in number and too little known, despite appearances, is in the process of losing at least its traditional aspect, which would have been fascinating for comparative sociology as well as for the history of the South American Indians.

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121 sociology as well as for the history of the South American Indians. I hope, however, that my material can be useful in the discussion on the social structures of central Brazil recently started by Lévi-Strauss and Maybury-Lewis, even if it is not yet the right moment for me to enter into it from my side.

113 /47/ Bibliography

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Discussion

184 Professor H. Baldus emphasizes the necessity of considering geographical differences in the study of the social organization of the Carajá of the north and of the south.

[For information concerning the clay figurines or "dolls" see category 532.]

[Information concerning the huts where masked dance costumes are made and stored, and which are prohibited to women, will be found in category 346.]

[For information concerning the masked dance ceremonies see category 535.]